E L D E R

PAISIOS

1924 - 1994

INTERNAL DISORDER AND EXTERNAL APPEARENCE

ΕΣΩΤΕΡΙΚΗ ΑΤΑΞΙΑ ΚΑΙ ΕΞΩΤΕΡΙΚΗ ΕΜΦΑΝΙΣΗ

EXTERNAL NOISE AND INTERNAL PEACE

ΕΞΩΤΕΡΙΚΟΣ ΘΟΡΥΒΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΕΣΩΤΕΡΙΚΗ ΗΣΥΧΙΑ

ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗ ΕΚΔΟΣΗ

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ELDER PAISIOS
(1924 – 1994)

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External Noise and Internal Peace

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ΒΙΟΓΡΑΦΙΚΟ ΣΗΜΕΙΩΜΑ

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The Blessed Elder Paisios, whose name in the world was Arsenios Eznepides, was born in *Pharasa* of Cappadocia on 25 July 1924. Shortly before his family left for Greece with the exchange of populations in 1924, the Elder was baptized by Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, who gave him his own name and foretold that "he was leaving a monk in his place." Upon arriving in Greece, his family settled in Konitsa of Epeirus where the Elder spent his childhood and young adult years.

From the time that he was a child, he lived an ascetic life, and was nourished by the lives of the Saints, whose feats he sought to imitate with great zeal and admirable precision. He practised unceasing prayer, cultivating all along the virtues of humility and love. He learned the trade of carpentry, wanting even in this aspect of his life, to imitate Christ. He fulfilled his military duty during the Guerilla War in Greece (1945-1949), serving for three and a half years in the Army as a wireless radio operator, and living ascetically even during this troubled time. During this time, he was distinguished for his valour, his ethos of self-sacrifice, moral integrity and many other virtues. Having fulfilled his duty to his country, he entered the

monastic life, which he had desired from his youth. Even as a layman, he had divine experiences, but the favour of the Lord, the *Theotokos* and the Saints intensified during his monastic life. He led an ascetic life on Mount Athos, in the Holy Monastery of Stomion in Konitsa, and on Mount Sinai in Egypt. He lived in obscurity, giving himself completely to God, and God in turn revealed him and gave him to the whole world. He guided, consoled, healed and granted peace to the multitudes of people who sought him. His sanctified soul overflowed with divine love and his saintly face radiated the divine Grace. All day long, he tirelessly gathered the human pain and imparted divine consolation.

He is the founder of the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti of Thessaloniki, Greece, which he also guided spiritually for twenty-eight years (1967-1994). It was to this Holy Monastery that he also entrusted and treasured the Holy Relics of his Godfather, Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian, to whose memory a temple of Byzantine design was later erected.

After suffering excruciating pains, which, as he used to say, benefited him more than the ascetic struggles of his entire life, he fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 1994, in the Holy Monastery of Saint John the Theologian in Souroti, Thessaloniki. He was buried next to the Church of Saint Arsenios the Cappadocian.

May we have his blessing, Amen.

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ΠΡΟΛΟΓΟΣ

PREFACE

When the Blessed Elder Paisios fell asleep in the Lord on 12 July 1994, he left behind a spiritual legacy: his teachings. Ever a simple monk, with only an elementary school education, but rich in the wisdom of God, the Elder emptied himself for the sake of others. His teaching was neither instruction, nor catechism. He lived the Gospel, and everything he taught flowed naturally from his way of life, whose main characteristic was love. He had formed himself according to the Gospel and, for this reason, it was his countenance that taught first and then his evangelical love and enlightened word. When he received people of all backgrounds, he did not simply listen patiently to the problems they confided in him, but with his holy simplicity and discernment, he would enter deeply into their heart and make their pain, anxiety and trouble his own. And, then, gradually, the miracle would take place: the transformation of the person. He used to say, "God performs a miracle when we wholeheartedly participate in the pain of our fellow human beings."

We saw with great joy the interest generated by the first books that circulated on the life and teachings of the Elder Paisios. Many spoke with admiration about the

answers they found to their questions, the solutions to their problems and the consolation to their grief. Our joy was even greater when people who had distanced themselves from the Mother Church became rightly concerned and changed their way of life. We often thought of the words of the hymnographer referring to Saint Basil the Great: *He lives, though he lies asleep in the Lord; he lives even among us, as one who speaks through his writings*. At the same time, we felt a compelling need to offer the very beneficial words of Elder Paisios – which we were recording with reverence from the very first steps of our Sisterhood, because they were so helpful to us – to our brothers and sisters in Christ who were so persistently asking for them.

The Good God provided that our *Hesychasterion*[1] owe its very existence to Elder Paisios. It was he who received the Episcopal approval of His Eminence, Synesios, the Metropolitan of Kassandreia, to establish our Monastery and who sought to find the appropriate location. And he did this because his noble and sensitive heart felt great gratitude to us for having taken care of him when we first met him, in 1966, during a hospital stay for a lung operation. From that time on, he felt that he was our big brother and had the obligation to "provide for his sisters," as he used to say, by establishing the Monastery. The first Sisters were settled at the Monastery in October of 1967. Elder Paisios spent two months in the *Hesychasterion* to help in the organization of the coenobitic life. After that, he would come out of Mount Athos, usually twice a year, to help the Sisterhood in their monastic way of life and he would assist each Sister individually in her spiritual struggle, with his God inspired advice and his personal experience. From the Holy Mountain, the "spiritual America", as he used to call it, he continued to help them through prayer and the letters he would send to each Sister individually or to the entire Sisterhood.

1. *Hesychasterion* (pl. *Hesychasteria)* in Greece and outside Mount Athos is a Coenobitic Monastery in which the local Bishop has the right to intervene in spiritual matters alone, but not in administrative matters.

In 1967, when Elder Paisios started establishing the foundations of coenobitic life in the *Hesychasterion*, from the simplest practical things to the most spiritual, he was forty-three years old. He had already attained the mature manhood *to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph 4:13) and he had the wisdom of an Elder. From the first days of coenobitic life, we discovered that his words were *the words of eternal life* (Jn 6:68) and that much of what he said should be taken as an axiom for our daily life. For this reason, we felt compelled to write down his words so that they would not to be forgotten and could serve as a secure rule for monastic life.

After we filled the first notebooks, we submitted them with considerable hesitation to his judgment. We hesitated because the Elder always emphasized the practical application; he did not want us just to gather material, "ammunitions", without putting his words into action. He always asked that we cultivate spiritually whatever we heard or read. Otherwise, he used to explain to us, there would be no benefit from all writings and notes just as there is no benefit to a state when it has a lot of armaments but lacks a trained army that will put them in use. Relenting to our persistent pleas, he agreed to see our notes and

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to complete or correct any points that we had not understood correctly.

The recording of his spiritual counsels continued all along the twenty-eight years that the Elder was overseeing and guiding the *Hesychasterion*. All meetings of the Elder with the entire Sisterhood or the Monastery Council and the Abbess were recorded – initially by notes taken down by the Sisters and later by tape recorder. Also recorded were conversations between the Elder and each Sister separately, who wrote down his words immediately after her conversation with him was over. When Elder Paisios realized what we were doing, he was rather irritated: "Why are you taking this down?" he asked. "Are you saving it for an emergency? You should put it into practice; apply it. Who knows what you are saying in these notes! Let me see." When we showed him a sample, the notes of one Sister, his expression changed; he was comforted and reassured, and with satisfaction exclaimed, "My goodness! She is like a tape recorder! She wrote it exactly as I said it!"

Our conversations with Elder Paisios were usually in the form of answers to our questions. In his private conversations with the Sisters, the questions mainly concerned their personal struggle. In meetings with the Monastery Council, which were scheduled in advance, subjects were raised that concerned us during his absence. These were put in the form of questions to be discussed when he came to visit. These questions covered all kinds of subjects: administrative, practical, spiritual, social, ecclesiastical, national and so forth. Finally, in meetings of the entire Sisterhood, besides the questions raised by the Sisters, the Elder discussed various other topics,

which simply came up on the spot, in the course of the conversation. The Elder would use every word and image he could for the spiritual benefit of the soul. The sound of an aeroplane flying over the Monastery, the noise of a machine, the chirping of a bird, the opening of a door or a simple phrase could set him talking for a long time about a serious matter. "I put everything to use," he used to say, "in order to reach Heaven. If we approach and work on all things spiritually, do you know how much spiritual profit can be made and what spiritual experience can be acquired?"

In his contacts with people, Father Paisios sought to prepare them for the Kingdom of Heaven by helping them to know the will of God and come closer to Him. Thus, he put to practice one of his favourite sayings that "the Good God looks after us first for our next life and then for this life." When he mentioned something about nature, science, art or everyday life, he was not interested in these subjects themselves, but used them as parables in order to awaken souls, and to help them grasp the deeper meaning of life and "cling" to God.

Because his manner of speech was simple, spontaneous and full of natural humour, he could tell the greatest truths in a plain and joyful manner. "I am making sunshine," he used to say; he meant that just like the sun is necessary for the flowers to bloom, a gentle pastoral approach enables the opening and healing of the soul. This was his enlightened pastoral care, which often prepared the soil of the soul to receive the austerity of his words about the unyielding and steadfast evangelical truth. In this way, even his most demanding word fell

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upon the human heart as a beneficial dew, cultivating it and bringing forth spiritual fruit.

After Elder Paisios fell asleep, the material that was collected during these twenty-eight years, together with the letters that he had sent to the *Hesychasterion* from the Holy Mountain, was classified according to subject so as to be used everyday in the life of the *Coenobium*. Events relating to his life were also recorded, including those of a divine nature, to which he referred not for bragging but for spiritual charity. "I am not telling you this," he used to say, "so that you can give me ribbons, and bravos. When I tell a war story from the time of my military service, or anything else, even a humorous example, I do so to make a point, so that you can grasp its deeper meaning. I don't like talking about useless things." In this manner he made himself a "spiritual blood donor". He wanted to fortify our anaemic faith, trigger our *philotimo*[2] and, being the noble man of God that he was, to cultivate the same nobility in us so that we can become by grace akin to God. "More and more I am emptying myself," he used to say, "and what is the result? In order to help you, I am forced to speak about myself; this is such a waste, a spiritual waste! Does it at least help you? I want you to know that every time I have to mention an incident from my life, how, for instance, the Providence of God has helped me on a certain occasion, something is being lost; I feel emptier. Does it at least bear fruit for you?"

2. *Philotimo*, according to Elder Paisios, is the reverent distillation of goodness, the love shown by humble people, from which every trace of self has been filtered out. Their hearts are full of gratitude towards God and their fellow men, and out of spiritual sensitivity and a sense of honour they try to repay the slightest good which others do for them.

Taking into account the difficult years that we are living through, we decided to publish all this material in a series of volumes starting with those topics that would be of general interest. Although many of these topics are part of everyday life, they must still be faced according to the Gospel; otherwise, the consequences for this life but also for our future, eternal life will be sorrowful or worse yet, devastating.

In making this decision, we were encouraged by an idea that Elder Paisios had entertained for years. He wanted to write "a book that would reach everybody, laity, monks and clergy." The idea had never materialized, since he gave all of his time to the many hurting souls who came every day to his *Kalyvi*. He gave himself completely to them, despite his limited and diminishing physical strength. "My news," he wrote in one of his letters "is many tired and suffering people. The people and their problems are ever increasing. Please pray that my physical strength not decrease. I need to provide a bit for myself, because I must be always ready to help, whether I can or not."

As already mentioned, the Elder usually responded to a variety of questions. For this reason, when faced with the task of integrating the various topics that he had addressed on different occasions, we decided to keep the dialogue form. Included in these dialogues, are excerpts from letters he had sent to the Monastery, extracts of books that he had written, as well as any additional material from his correspondence with other brothers and sisters in Christ, who entrusted us with their letters and with notes they had kept in their conversations with the Elder.

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The aim was to give each topic the fullest possible coverage. Every effort was also made to preserve, as much as possible, the immediacy and the grace of his spoken words. Some repetitive remarks that stressed the deeper meaning of his word and pierced many hearts were retained, as well as many exclamations, which were a natural part of his story telling, coming from a heart that was pulsating with great love for God and humankind.

References to monastic life are frequent, not only because Father Paisios was addressing nuns, but also because he wanted lay people to seek "the joy of Monasticism" that springs from total surrender to God. He believed that in this way they might be saved from the insecurity caused by a total dependence on the self. He wanted them to enjoy Heaven in this life.

With Pain and Love for Contemporary Man is the first volume of the series *Spiritual Counsels* of the Elder Paisios of Mount Athos. In order to make its content more useful to the reader, it was divided into four thematic parts. Each part is subdivided into chapters and every chapter into sections with the appropriate subheadings. Footnotes that explain terms from the spiritual and monastic life will be more than familiar to those brothers and sisters in Christ who are well acquainted with patristic texts. They have been added in order to assist readers who lack this background.

As Elder Paisios made frequent use of examples from science, art and other fields, as noted above, we ran the risk of not rendering correctly some of his verbal terminology or expressions. For this reason, before publication, we

invited the review of certain sections and chapters from brothers and sisters in Christ who specialise in the relevant areas. We wish to thank them for examining this material with great reverence for the Elder and for making the appropriate corrections. We would, of course, be grateful for any additional suggestions.

We pray that "the spiritual waste" offered by the Elder out of an abundance of love, will bear fruit in the simple and good willing hearts of his readers, and that they will be enriched with the wisdom of God that is *hidden from the wise and prudent and revealed to babes* (Lk 10:21). Amen.

Sunday of All Saints, June 14, 1998

The Abbess of the Holy *Hesychasterion*
Mother Philothei
and the Sisters in Christ with me

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CHAPTER FIVE

Internal Disorder and External Appearance

Secular *People Put on What They Carry Inside*

Geronda, give me a blessing.

– I pray for you to become a spiritual clown like Saint Isidora[1] the "fool for Christ's sake", and gain the good kind of hypocrisy. You see, everyday the poor souls that live in the world celebrate their secular hypocrisy; they put on costumes based on what they have in their heart. In the old days, people would dress in costumes so as to look like a different person and so on, only for the Carnival, once a year, just before Great Lent. Nowadays, most have some kind of "costume" on; it's a daily spectacle. Each person will dress as his own

1. Saint Isidora lived in the Monastery of Tabennisians, which was founded in the beginning of the fourth century by Saint Pachomios. She pretended to be a "fool for Christ' sake" and would ridicule herself. Instead of the nun's veil, she would wear a rag on her head and never put on any shoes. She never complained or insulted anyone despite the fact that she received insults and beatings many times. The sanctity of her life was revealed to the great ascetic Pitiroun in a vision. He visited the Monastery and disclosed before the entire Sisterhood that Isidora, whom they considered crazy, was in fact an Amma, that is, a Spiritual Mother.

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mind tells him! People have become really strange. They are fools! Few are the people, men or women or children, who are modest and decent. Women especially are in the worst shape.

Today on my way to town, I saw a woman wearing a very wide ribbon, like a bandage, on her head, very tall boots and a short dress. "This is the latest fashion!" someone explained. Some women will wear shoes with heels that are so thin that one misstep will send them to the orthopaedic surgeon. As for the hair, don't even ask! Another woman – may God forgive me – I don't know if she was human. She had this wild face, with red glaring eyes, smoking a cigarette and puffing the smoke in and out! These days many say that they have this rule not to smoke at home if they have children. That's good, but in the meantime so many children are born like smoked herrings! Coffee will also make people act strange; observe their faces and you'll see all kinds of grimaces. God's Grace has left them. They are totally abandoned.

I remember, when I was at Sinai Monastery things were getting out of hand, it was just as bad. The sight of the female tourists visiting the Monastery would give me such a pain! They looked awful! It was like seeing beautiful Byzantine icons thrown in a garbage can, except that in this case, they had put themselves there. Once I saw a woman wearing something like a cape and I said to myself, "Thank God! Here's one who is wearing something decent, whatever it may be. At least she is not like the others." But when she turned around, I realized it was all open in the front!

Where is this world coming to? Once, they sent me a picture of a bride, and asked me to pray that her

marriage would be a good one. She was wearing this awful wedding gown. When they dress this way, they are showing irreverence to the Mystery of Marriage and to the Church whose space is sacred. These are supposedly spiritual people and yet they don't seem to think twice about their dress. What will those who are not spiritual do, if they follow their example? That's why I am saying that if Monasteries do not hold the line, no one else will put the brakes on people. They are out of control!

In the old days, when we had the fools for Christ's sake, there were very few crazy people in the world. Perhaps we should pray to those who have been fools for Christ's sake to heal today's natural fools, and help them become fools for Christ! At any rate, today one can hear and see the strangest things. Someone told me – and I crossed myself when I heard it – that the fashion these days is to wear patched clothes; it's the work of young people who have nothing better to do, so they rub their clothes, wear them down here and there, and then cut and sew rough patches on them. Now, that is natural in a hard working man, but it does not make sense in someone who is lying around all day. And the man went on, "Let me tell you, Geronda, about another case that is even more bizarre. My wife ran into the son of a family friend in Omonoia Square in Athens, and the young man was wearing a pair of pants torn in the back. 'Dear,' she said, 'put your hand in the back...' 'Get off my case,' the young man replied 'that's the fashion' "! Poor souls!

– Is it correct, Geronda, for people to wear T-shirts with pictures of Saints on them?

– If the picture is on a T-shirt or jacket, it is fine; it does not do any harm. It is actually better than putting the

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Nowadays the fashion is to cut the hair short and leave a tail in the back. "Now can you boys tell me what's the meaning of this tail?" I sometimes ask. And you know what they say? "We do it for drawing attention." "You are wasting your time," I reply. "People today have so many problems that they will not even notice you." You'll see full-grown, robust, young men wearing earrings! You should see all the earrings I have removed!

– Geronda, some young men will wear only one earring.

– It's the anarchists who do that. The single earring symbolizes anarchy. They don't do it because they are effeminate; they pierce their ear and put an earring as a sign of resistance. Once, a twenty-two year-old fellow, with long hair, a beard and one earring, came to my *Kalyvi* with his father. "This earring," I told him, "does not look good on you. I know what it means but many people don't and they might misunderstand you." The fellow took it off and handed it to me. It was a gold earring. "Give it to a jeweller to make you a little cross," I said to him.

– Others, Geronda, will wear a ring on their nose.

– This means that the devil has put the ring on them and leads them by the nose; of course, the reins are not visible. Others wear layers and layers of wide golden chains around their neck. Once, I gave one such young fellow a thorough reprimand. After I removed the chains from his neck, I said to him, "Go give them to an orphan, or give them to your mother, or go find someone who is poor and give them to him." He came to his senses and asked me, "What must I do, Father?" "Start by wearing one chain with a small cross," I said. Can you imagine men wearing this kind of jewellery, wide, gold, two and three layers?

Even princesses do not carry so much gold around their neck. And then they come and tell you that they have problems. The problem is right there, on their neck. So I have a canon, a holy rule, on this matter too. In some cases, I myself will take the jewellery away; in others, I tell them to give it away themselves. These young people have no sense of moderation whatsoever! They've lost it altogether! Some have these zodiac signs hanging around their neck. I asked a young man, "What's that? I have not seen anything like it before." "It's my zodiac sign," he replied. I thought perhaps it was a *Panaghia*. "Are you wearing an animal sign because you are some kind of animal?" I asked him. It's one crazy thing after another! All the inner disorder comes to the surface. We must pray all the time that God will enlighten our young people so that some yeast may be spared for the future.

People Are Thirsting For Simplicity

The good thing is that people are thirsting for simplicity and have reached the point of turning simplicity into a fashion even though they may not feel simple. Some come to the Holy Mountain with washed out and shabby clothes. I say to myself, "These people do not work in the fields; why do they dress this way?" Take someone who speaks like a villager because he comes from a village and that's his accent. You enjoy hearing him for this reason; it's natural. But when someone is faking the accent, you feel like throwing up. Then, you have some visitors who come dressed in ties. We go from the one extreme to the other. One person had six or seven ties with him. Once, a man was putting on a suit and a tie and someone asked

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picture of the devil. But if the picture of a Saint is printed on the pants, it's inappropriate; that's impiety. They're some pious people who will do this with their clothes. When the Patriarch Demetrios visited the United States, they made T-shirts with his picture on them and a picture of the Church of Haghia Sophia, in Constantinople.

– Was it out of piety that they did that?

– What else? They were Orthodox Christians after all, not Jews or Muslims and so on! There are people out there who will do the right thing, just like there are good and bad doctors.

– Geronda, is some of the disorder that we see around us caused by foreign influence?

– Well, where else would it come from? This is why, in my days, they used to say about people, "What do you expect, they are from Smyrna..." Smyrna was a seaside city visited by many foreigners. Saint Arsenios was very strict about such matters. There was a newly wed bride in *Pharasa* who wore a very provocative colourful scarf in the Smyrna style. The Saint reprimanded her repeatedly, telling her to throw it away and dress modestly like the rest of the women in *Pharasa*. But she would not listen. One day, when Saint Arsenios saw her wearing the same scarf, he told her in a strict tone, "I do not want Frankish diseases in *Pharasa*. Be warned, that if you don't do as you're told, the children you bear will not live long after they are baptized; they will become angels and you will not enjoy any of them." But she did not heed to Saint Arsenios' warning and indeed she lost two of her little angels. Only then, did she come to her senses, threw away the multicoloured scarf, and went to Saint Arsenios to ask for forgiveness.

– Geronda, does wearing dark coloured clothes help someone, who wants to be a monk, in his spiritual life?

– Yes, they are of great help. When we wear dark-coloured clothes, it's easier to detach ourselves from the world, whereas colourful clothing keeps us attached. Now, if someone were to say "I will wait and put on black clothes when I get to the Monastery," or "I will wait and observe the monastic rule when I am there," he won't amount to much – "black" will be the colour of his achievements. One who, while living in the world, will gladly adopt the monastic rule, and will desire it with all his heart, this person will experience spiritual joy both in this world and later, when he becomes a monk; he will ascend the rungs of the spiritual ladder faster than most.

– Sometimes, Geronda, religious young people who dress decently meet great opposition from adults.

– If they have faith, and dress this way because their heart tells them, they may end up correcting the adults, putting them in their proper place. I had known a girl who wore black clothes with long sleeves down to her wrists. That's how pious she was. Once, an elderly woman, dressed in modern style, said to her, "Aren't you ashamed, at your age, to be dressed in black and wear long sleeves?" "Since you are not setting the example for us," the young woman replied, "we are trying to set the example ourselves," and with these words she put her in her place.

There is more. Nowadays, recently widowed women will not hesitate to wear colourful clothes. But what can you say? My sister became a widow at twenty-three and remained a widow until her death, and always wore black. As I see it, those widows who have worn black in this life, even involuntarily, and who live a "white" spiritual life,

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praising God without complaining, are more blessed than those poor souls who wear colourful clothing and lead a "colourful", loose life.

Today You Cannot Tell a Man From a Woman

Once, to test the wise Solomon, they presented him with a group of boys and a group of girls identically dressed to see if he could tell them apart. He led them to a fountain and asked them to wash their faces. He was able to tell the boys from the girls by watching the way they were washing their faces. The girls were throwing the water on their faces carefully and gently, while the boys were splashing it, making noise with their palms.

Today men are imitating women to such a degree that many times you cannot tell them apart. In the old days, you could tell a man from a woman from as far away as five hundreds meters. Nowadays, it's difficult to tell them apart even from up close. "Is it a man," you wonder, "or, is it a woman?" This is as prophecy goes, that a time will come when we will not be able to tell the difference between men and women. The Elder Arsenios the Spelaiotis,[2] told a young man whose hair was waist long, "Well now, what exactly are you, a man or a woman?" He couldn't tell. In the old days, they used to give haircuts to the visitors of the Holy Mountain. Now they let them come any way they want. I give them a haircut with the scissors I use to cut the wool when I make *komboschoinia*. I have given many haircuts behind the altar of the

2. Elder Arsenios the Spelaiotis (1886-1983) was an ascetic Monk who lived in the caves of the Saint Anna area of the Holy Mountain.

Church. When long-haired men come, I tell them, "I have promised some bald friends of mine that I will give them their hair back. For love's sake, then, please let me cut your hair! What can I do? I have given them my word!"

– Do they accept it, Geronda?

– It makes a difference how one speaks to them. I don't tell them, "You look awful! Aren't you ashamed of yourselves? Don't you respect this sacred place?" Instead, I say, "You know, fellows, that long hair of yours is an insult to your manliness. What would you think if you saw a national guardsman in Omonoia Square carrying a woman's purse? Is there a way the two can fit? Let's get rid of the hair!" And I go ahead and give them a haircut. Do you know how much hair I have collected? If someone is reluctant and asks for the reason, I say to him, "What do you mean, why? I am a monk, right? It's my job, to make tonsures!" It's how you say something that makes the difference. They start laughing and that's where it all ends. After all, I only give them a haircut; I am not changing their names! Only once I named someone *Axion Estin* because at the time I was cutting his hair, a procession was passing by with the famous holy icon *Axion Estin*.[3] Oh, how parents rejoice when I cut their sons' long hair! Do you know how many "thank-you" notes I get from parents, especially from mothers? From this alone God will forgive me!

3. *Axion Estin*: Refers to the icon of the *Theotokos*, which is called *Axion Estin*. According to Tradition it was in front of this historic icon that the Archangel Gabriel taught the hymn, "It is truly worthy (*Axion Estin*) to bless you, O *Theotokos*..." to a Monk of the tenth century. Later, the Archangel Gabriel engraved the hymn on a slate at the request of the Monk. The naming of the icon is due to this occurrence as is the feast commemorating the event.

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him why he was dressing up. "I am going to see Father Paisios," he said. "So why are you dressing up like that?" "Because I want to honour him," was his answer. Oh, now we are in trouble!

The reason we see so much rebellion around us, is because true simplicity is absent. When spiritual people do not live a truly simple life, and don't open up, they cannot help our youth. That's why you see them acting like hooligans; they have nothing better to imitate. When young people see Christians being stiff, suit and tie on, all coming out of the same mould, they see no difference between them and those living in the world, and naturally they rebel. If they could see the good simplicity in spiritual people, they would not have reached this point. But now, the young are guided by secular norms, and so are religious people. "This is the way Christians are supposed to walk and this is the way they are supposed to do this and that…" That's all that you hear from them. And they don't behave this way out of true reverence; no; they do it because "it's our duty." This is why young people react and say, "What nonsense is this? How can they go to Church all stiff and buttoned up! Forget it; I am getting out of here!" and start taking off everything and going around naked. Don't you see? They go from one extreme to the other. It's all a reaction. They have values and ideals, but no models to emulate; I feel so sorry for them. This is why it's so important to arouse their *philotimo*, to move them with the simplicity of our lives. If they see priests and those they consider spiritual people, attempt to restrain them with the ways of this world, they will be indignant. But if they encounter unassuming modesty, simplicity and sincerity, they will begin to

question their lives. For when we are sincere and do not attach importance to ourselves, we are thus authentically simple persons with humility. All this provides peace for the person himself, but is also noticed and appreciated by others. You see, people can tell if you really feel their pain. They know right away when you are pretending. Take any bum from the street; he is a better man than a Christian who is a hypocrite. For this reason, never give people a fake smile, but always be natural; avoid malice and hypocrisy; be full of love and sincerity. For me, it's far more important that we have the good kind of order in our inner lives. I am really moved when I see respect and true love, when the person behaves simply and avoids formalities. For otherwise, when it's all a front, we end up being human only in appearance, we put on a show like a carnival clown.

The soul of a true human being is beautiful, full of inner purity, and this beauty is not only present within the soul but is carried over into one's appearance; the divine sweetness of God's love is so pervasive that we can see it on a person's face. Our soul's inner beauty will make us beautiful and holy inside, and will even alter our appearance. We will be betrayed by the presence of God's Grace in us, so that even if our clothing is poor and ugly, it will appear beautiful and holy to those who meet us. Father Tychon used to sew his own monastic caps using the cloth from worn out cassocks. The caps he made looked like bags, but when he wore them, they were full of grace. No matter how old or unkempt his clothes were, they looked beautiful because his soul had so much beauty. Once, a visitor photographed him wearing one of these loose and awkward caps on his head and a pyjama top – a visitor

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who realized that Father was feeling cold had thrown it over his shoulders. Everybody who sees this picture now is convinced that Father Tychon is wearing a bishop's *mandya*, when in fact it's only a colourful pyjama that he has on. People would approach even his rags with reverence and would take a piece for a blessing. Far greater is the worth of a single blessed man like Father Tychon, who changed his inner man and thus became holy in appearance, than the worth of so many others who are constantly putting on new clothes and yet keep wearing the same man inside, buried under layers of sin.

"A Woman Shall Not Wear Anything That Pertains to a Man, Nor Shall a Man Put on a Woman's Garment"[4]

– Geronda, how should we deal with women who come to the Monastery in pants? They often claim that they are more practical and more decent than short dresses.

– These days it's either short dresses or pants! Doesn't the Old Testament say very clearly and with all these details, "A man shall not wear a woman's garment and a woman shall not wear a man's garment"? It's the law of God and on top of that it's inappropriate. Men rarely, very rarely wear dresses.

– Women who work in the fields, however, say that it's easier for them to do their job if they wear pants.

– These are excuses.

4. Dt 22:5. *A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment: for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.*

– Geronda, mothers say that they dress their little girls in pants to keep them warm.

– Is this the only way they can solve this problem? How about stockings? Can't they wear stockings or something else that will cover their legs and keep them warm? Where there is a will, there is a way.

– Geronda, what should we do when dignitaries come and are accompanied by a woman wearing pants?

– You must explain to them, "Do you want us to make an exception, break a rule and disrupt the order of our Monastery?"

– Once, Geronda, thirty high school teachers came wearing pants and we let them go in.

– That was wrong. You should have told them, "Sorry, but it is the policy of the Monastery not to allow entrance to women in pants." These women will then go to other Monasteries and say, "In such and such a Monastery they let us in with pants." You accommodated them because you did not want to insult them, but they will turn and insult you. Place a sign at the gate with the relevant passage from the Old Testament. Make fifty skirts and offer them politely to female visitors in pants or short dresses, who come for the first time and don't know the rules.

– Geronda, what happens if a High School comes and all the girls are wearing pants?

– You should offer them a treat outside the gate. That will give them reason to think about the issue. Or, if they call in advance to notify you of the visit, let them know that women are not allowed in if they wear pants. This way they will realize that they must show respect for this place. This is not a parish. It is the responsibility of the parish priest to educate women and explain why they

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should not be wearing pants and why it's important to conform to this rule. If at some point, women from another parish visit his Church wearing pants, he should try and take care of the problem, keeping in mind that the Church is our Mother; She is not a stepmother.

– But, Geronda, many people say, "With all these restrictions, you are actually driving people away from the Church."

– Doesn't the Old Testament contain a commandment from God that forbids women to wear man's clothing? What more do they want? But you see there is more to this. First they start with, "But why shouldn't women also wear pants?" and then you'll hear, "Why shouldn't atheists be allowed to serve on the Parish Council, since it is the people who are the Church?" If they get their way, the fate of the Church will be in the hands of atheists. They will start removing one thing after another and in the end they will turn Churches into libraries and warehouses. "Why not remove this, why not take away that?" What can you say?

When half-naked tourists come to the Monastery, they should not be tolerated under the pretext of collecting money to help dress the poor; this is a scheme planned by the devil who wants to alienate the monk from God's blessings and make him indistinguishable from those who live in the world. For true wealth can be found only in the virtues we acquire, when we leave the world and live in exile for the sake of Christ.

– Geronda, when you were at Stomion Monastery, did you have to post signs for tourists?

– Sure, I had to. At the Monastery, I put a sign, which read, "Welcome to the Monastery." About twenty minutes

down the road from the Monastery, I put another sign which read, "Those who are dressed indecently may head for the River Aoos,"[5] with an arrow pointing in that direction. The third sign read, "Those who are dressed decently can head for the Monastery," with an arrow pointing toward the Monastery. Wasn't that a good idea?

– What must we do, Geronda, during the summer when many women come with bare shoulders?

– Well, weave a shawl or something that they can put over their shoulders. This way they will realize that when they are on Monastery grounds, they need to show respect and reverence.

Cosmetics: Smudges on the Image of God

So many people today have taken up useless and vain activities! Take women, for instance, they put all these foul smelling sprays on their hair. They are enough to give you an allergy. When I see a sophisticated, worldly woman with her worldly looks and perfumes, my stomach turns. I was told once, "So and so went to Germany to become a beautician." "What is that?" I asked. "A beautician," they informed me, "makes an old woman look young again." Then I remembered that I had actually seen an older woman who had a straight line across her forehead. So I asked someone who knew her, "Poor soul, what's the matter with her?" "Oh, it's nothing," I was told. "She had surgery, a face-lift, to get rid of her wrinkles." And I was under the impression that she was in an accident and had to have surgery. What has the world come to!

5. The River Aoos flows below the Holy Monastery of Stomion in Konitsa.

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– Geronda, today people do not consider that using make-up and cosmetics is a sin.

– Yes, I am aware of that. I ran into a soul once, who used to have the face of an angel. She had so much make-up on, that I did not recognize her. "God made everything good," I told her, "but He has made a mistake with you." "Why, Father?" she asked. "Here, right under your eyes, He did not put enough black ink! That's the mistake He made. He made everybody else good and beautiful, but in your case, He made a mistake. You poor soul, are you blind? Can't you see that you are actually making yourself ugly? It's like taking a beautiful Byzantine icon, and painting all over it, smudging and ruining it with your brush strokes. We want to paint over the image of God. It's like someone who knows nothing about painting, taking a great painter's masterwork and starting to paint over it, making it uglier with each additional brush stroke. This is like saying to God, 'My God, You did not do this right, let me fix it'!"

Another time, a woman came to see me with nails long like a hawk's, painted bright red, and told me, "I have a gravely ill child and I have been praying for his health but nothing happens. Please pray for him, Father, because my prayers..." "What kind of prayer are you really offering?" I answered. "All you are doing is scratching Christ with these nails! If you want your child to get well, the first thing to do is to cut off your nails. The least you can do for his health is to cut them off and remove that polish. Do it as a sacrifice for his well-being." "Should I then paint them white, Father?" she insisted. "What I am saying to you is remove the polish and cut them off – make this simple sacrifice for the health of your child – and

you want to know if you can paint them white? Are you serious? If God wanted you to have red nails, He would have made you that way." "Can I paint them white?" she asked again. Oh, I've had it! "The way you are going, both you and your child will do well," I thought to myself. It's the mother more than anyone else who can give her children a "cold" when she is not dressed with modesty; some mothers will even exploit their children for their own welfare.

A person may not be very good looking, or they may have some handicap. God knows that such flaws will help people spiritually because God is interested more in our soul than He is in our body. All of us have our qualities and shortcomings – small crosses to bear, nothing big – that help us save our soul.

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CHAPTER FOUR

External Noise and Internal Peace

Peaceful Nature Is Now Spoiled

Most of the devices that people use these days for their comfort are so noisy. They have turned nature, which is always so peaceful, crazy with all this noise! Using all these modern means they have managed to spoil it. Remember how serene it was before! How does man manage to destroy and be destroyed without even realizing it!

Now, we have all learned to live with noise. In fact, there are many children who cannot study without listening to rock and roll music. In other words, they find it more restful to study with music, rather than in peace and quiet. The reason this external unrest makes them comfortable is because they feel unrest inside. There is noise everywhere. You constantly hear a buzz: buzz when they cut wood, buzz when they sandpaper it, and buzz when they spray with the vaporizer. In the future they will invent vaporizers the size of aeroplanes that will make even more noise and they will say, "Oh, these are better because they spray from above and do not leave even a single bud unsprayed." And of course everybody will

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want to buy from those producers and will be so pleased for having done so.

Someone wants to drill a hole in the wall, and he plugs in the electric drill! All this noise and what does he achieve? He drills a "hole in the water"! And the funny thing is that he is so proud of it! When it gets hot and he wants to cool off, he goes and buys an electric fan. In the old days, if you wanted to cool off you would use a simple hand fan … now you must go deaf first. Even in the sea, everything has become so noisy. In the old days, ships sailed by quietly. Now even the smallest motorboat is so noisy. Pretty soon people will be going everywhere in an aeroplane. And you realize the earth absorbs some of the noise, but the air does not … may God help us!

They Have Even Ruined the Sacred Places

The restless secular spirit of our times, with its supposed civilization, has unfortunately destroyed even the sacred sites of the desert that bring so much peace and sanctification to souls. The restless person cannot find peace. They have not left any place on earth in peace. They have even gotten hold of the Holy Land. As mentioned in the biography of Hermit Photeini,[1] kiosks and cantinas have been built in the desert, where once she had lived as an ascetic. Inside the actual ascetic cells, where

1. The Hermit Photeini of Greek parentage was born in Damascus, Syria, on January 7, 1860. Around 1884 she departed for the desert beyond the Jordan River. In 1915 the First World War forced her to move to Jerusalem, where she remained till the end of the war. Then she went to the desert west of the Dead Sea, where she became an ascetic till her death. (See Arch. Joakeim Spetsieris. *Hermit Photeini. Kalyvi* Saints Anargyroi, New *Skete*, Holy Mountain, 1994).

so many saintly people had lived, the British were selling refreshments! There goes the desert! It is now full of houses, radios, stores, hotels and airports! What Saint Cosmas had once predicted, has now happened, "A time will come when gypsies will hang their instruments where our brave young men now hang their weapons!"

I mean to say that we have come down to that too. Where monks once lived ascetic lives, weaving their *komboschoinia* and saying their prayers, we now have radios and soft drinks! Anyway, it seems to me that in a few years, we will not anymore need all these things. The way we are going, it seems that life is coming to an end. The end of life … the end of the world is near.

– Geronda, is there a quiet place left on the Holy Mountain of Athos?

– No, even there you cannot find a quiet spot; everywhere you go they are opening up forest roads! Cars are everywhere! Even the most remote and quiet places can now be reached by car! I wonder what these people are seeking in the desert! When a gentle wind from the desert stirred the reeds, Arsenios the Great would say, "What sound is this? Is it an earthquake?"[2] I wonder what the Holy Fathers would have said if they had seen and heard what is happening today!

In the old days, certain monks, especially those who served in the refectory and in the hospitality house of the

2. One day Abba Arsenios came to a place where there were reeds blowing in the wind. Abba Arsenios said to the Brothers, "What is this movement?" They said, "Some reeds." Then the Abba said to them, "When one who is living in silent prayer hears the song of a little sparrow, his heart no longer experiences the same peace. How much worse it is when you hear the movement of those reeds." *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Abba Arsenios, p. 11:25.

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Coenobitic Monasteries, would get very tired. They had to wash dishes, scrub the copper utensil, and so on. Today they have conveniences, modern devices, and most of them are noisy. I remember, in our Monastery, we used to carry water in containers from a spring and would slowly lift it to the third floor with a windlass. Now they bring the water up with an engine and you hear its constant noise. The walls shake and the windowpanes creak! They should at least put a sound barrier around it! When I was serving in the army, during the Guerilla War, I used to charge the radio battery using a silencer so the noise would not bother the people near by.

One day some monks came to my *Kalyvi* and started speaking very loudly. I said to one of them, "Speak more softly; they can hear us over there." He continued to speak loudly. "Lower your voice," I repeated. "Bless me Father," he said finally. "We have a generator in the Monastery and we have become accustomed to speaking loudly to hear each other." Can you believe that? Instead of saying the Jesus prayer and speaking in a low voice, they shout because they got used to having a generator. We are getting to be like those young people who interfere with the exhaust pipe of their bikes and make all this noise – this same spirit has penetrated into our Monasteries. That's where we are heading; and people are really enjoying being loud.

I saw one of the Sisters this morning. She resembled an astronaut! She was descending the slope with a hat on her head, a mask over her mouth and nose, and the lawn mower in her hand, totally satisfied with herself. Even the astronauts were not as satisfied with themselves when they returned from the moon! Shortly after that I heard

the noise of the lawn mower, I looked over and saw that she was cutting the weeds with it. The idea is to leave no place in peace. As soon as she finished, another person came with an even louder machine and started ploughing. The plough ran here, it ran there, ploughing the ground. Then another noisy machine was used to straighten the ploughed soil. See what has happened to us!

– But, Geronda, these machines make our lives easier.

– Oh, there are too many of these devices around! You must avoid noise and loud sounds as much as possible. This constant buzzing removes us from the real monastic way of life. Why then do you have a sign outside that says, *Hesychasterion*?[3] Why do not write "buzzing place" or a "place of unrest"? What is the use of the Monastery if there is no peace and tranquillity? Try, where possible, to reduce the noise around you. I see that you have not yet experienced the sweet *hesychia*[4] because if you did, you would understand both me and what I am trying to say. If you had tasted the spiritual fruit of *hesychia*, you would become so concerned about losing it, that you would pursue it in earnest at all times.

Tranquillity Is Mystical Prayer

When the monk makes use of all these noisy devices, he does away with the preconditions for prayer and the monastic way of life. For this reason, we should avoid using noisy devices as much as possible. What people

3. The Greek word *Hesychasterion* is derived from the word ἡσυχία (*hesychia*), which means stillness.

4. *Hesychia* is the state of prayerful tranquillity and stillness.

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today consider to be conveniences, do not actually help the monk achieve his goal. A monk cannot find in such a noisy environment what he set out to find by becoming a monk.

To be tranquil is very important. Even if one is not actually praying, tranquillity will put him in a state of prayer. Much like our imperceptible breathing, tranquillity is mystical prayer and of great help to those who seek to pray. Those who labour spiritually while in a state of tranquillity will lose themselves in the Jesus Prayer. Do you know what it really means to lose oneself that way? When a small child rests contentedly in his mother's arms, he is quiet, he does not talk. The two are now united in deep communication. This is why it is good for Monasteries to be located in isolated areas, away from the rest of the world, away from archaeological sites, worldly noises and great numbers of people.

External tranquillity, living away from the world, along with discerning asceticism and unceasing prayer, will soon bring about the inner tranquillity, the peace of the soul, which is an essential precondition for the more refined and more profound prayer of the heart. When one attains this state, he is no longer disturbed by any external distractions, since in reality it is only his body that is on earth, while his mind is in Heaven.

You Hear the Noise Only If You Want to Hear It

– Geronda, what can someone do if noise is involved when carrying out his duties, or if a noisy machine is required to do his work?

– When our duties must be done in a noisy environment, a quite chant is very helpful. If you cannot concentrate to say the Jesus Prayer, then chant. You must be patient. When I travel from Mount Athos to Thessaloniki, the boat is very noisy. I sit in a corner with my eyes closed as if I was asleep and I chant. I chant everything you can imagine. I chant the *Axion estin* and *Aghios o Theos* many times. The boat makes a clatter that accompanies my chanting really well. This clatter actually keeps the right tone for Papanikolaou's *Axion Estin* and Neleos' *Agios o Theos*. It fits with everything. I chant mentally but my heart participates too.

At any rate, I think that it's not so much the external noise that is disturbing, but one's internal concerns and anxieties. You can always avoid hearing noises, but you cannot avoid worries. At the root of it all is the mind. Our eyes could be looking at something without really seeing it. When I am praying, I may have my eyes open, but I don't really see anything. I am walking and perhaps observing a landscape and so on, but not really seeing it. When someone has difficulty in saying the Jesus Prayer in a noisy place, it is because his mind is not completely given to God. A person must attain a kind of divine absence of mind, in order to experience inner tranquillity and not be distracted by noise while praying. One can actually attain such a state of divine absent-mindedness where he no longer hears the noise, or he hears it only when he wants or, actually, when his mind comes back from Heaven. And one can reach this point if he works spiritually, if he struggles. Then he will hear the sounds around him only when he wants to.

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When I was in the army, I said once to a fellow soldier who was pious, "We will meet at such and such a place." "But there is a loudspeaker there," he replied. "If one wants to hear, he will hear; if he does not want to hear, he will not hear." When our mind is very concentrated on some particular thing, do we hear anything? In the forest across from my *Kalyvi*, they have stripped the mountain with the chain saws. When I was absorbed in reading or praying I did not hear anything. When I stopped, then I heard everything.

We Should Respect Other People's Need For Tranquillity

When we are not the cause of noise, it does not matter. God sees that. But when we are the cause, then it's bad, which is why we must be careful not to disturb others. If one does not want to pray he should at least not interfere with the prayers of others. If you realized how easy it is to harm a person who is praying, you would be very careful. For, if one does not take care to be quiet out of respect for others, but also because he himself feels the need to be quiet, he will not do it wholeheartedly, out of love, but will act out of necessity and a sense of obligation, and the outcome will not be good. When one feels coerced and acts out of a sense of duty, thinking, "Now I must walk this way so that I will not disturb; now I must not walk freely as I wish," respecting the tranquillity of others becomes such a burden. The point is to be mindful of others who are praying and to do it willingly and with joy precisely because they are praying and communicating with God. These two attitudes are totally different. Whatever one

does with his heart, he enjoys it and it helps him; and when he feels in his heart the need to respect his fellow human being who is praying, he also has a sense of awe afterwards. When we have respect for the other person, we have respect for ourselves and we do not consider our own self first, because instead of self-love we have *philotimo*. We must put ourselves in the other person's place. We should think, "If I were in his place how would I want people to treat me? If I were tired, if I were praying, would I want people to bang doors like that?" When we put ourselves in another's place things change.

How beautiful life was in the Coenobitic Monasteries in the past! There was such peace! There was even a clock that struck every quarter of an hour to remind each of us to say the Jesus Prayer. Even if someone were distracted and forgot, the clock would remind him to pray again. The clock helped a lot. When the Fathers were saying the Prayer, there was so much tranquillity inside the Monastery. There were sixty Fathers in my *Coenobium* on the Holy Mountain, but it felt as if there was only one *hesychast*. In Church, only a few people chanted while the majority prayed mentally. The same was happening when the different monastic chores and duties were being carried out. There was stillness and quiet everywhere! They did not speak loudly or shout. They all did their assigned work quietly. They all moved about quietly, like sheep. There was always a silent movement in the Monastery. It was not like today where they have put aside a specific time for the various duties, a time for chores, a time for quiet, a time for curfew! In the past each person moved according to his assignment.

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We must develop a love and a respect for the blessed desert, if we want its holy solitude and sweet stillness to help us become peaceful, get rid of our passions and approach God. We must be vigilant not to adapt the sacred desert to our passionate selves. This would be a great impiety; it would be like going on a pilgrimage to Holy Golgotha with *bouzouki*.

Good Thoughts Are the Antidote to Noise

Since, unfortunately, modern man uses noisy devices even for small things, it is important, if we ever find ourselves in a noisy place, to cultivate good thoughts to counter the noise. It is not right to demand, "Do not use this, or do not use that, because it makes noise." It is better to immediately bring good thoughts to mind. For example, when you hear a spraying machine, try to imagine that it's coming from a helicopter. Think of something like, "A Sister could have been gravely ill at this time and a helicopter could have been coming to take her to the hospital. How troublesome would the noise have been then? Thank God, we are all well." This is where you should be applying your mind and cleverness, to the art of bringing good thoughts to mind. For example, when you hear the noise of the cement mixer and its pumping equipment which elevates the cement, you should be thinking, "Thank God, it is not a bombardment, houses are not being destroyed; people are living in peace and are building houses."

– Geronda, what happens when the nerves are shattered?

– Shattered nerves? What does that mean? Could it be that your thoughts are shattered? There's nothing better

than a good thought. A layman had built a house in a quiet place. Shortly afterwards a garage was built on one side, a new road on the other, and an entertainment centre with music till midnight, on the other. The poor man could not sleep. He put on earplugs and started taking sleeping pills. He was going mad. He came to see me. "Geronda, this is the situation," he told me, "and I cannot find peace. What must I do? I am thinking of building another house." "You should bring good thoughts to mind," I replied. "You should think that if a war was going on and tanks were being made in the garage next door, and the hospital was receiving the wounded, and you were told, 'Stay here. We will guarantee your safety and no harm will come you in this area,' wouldn't you think that this is a great thing and consider it a blessing? That is why you should be saying to yourself, 'Thank God, there is no war and people are well, going about their business. In the garage they are repairing cars instead of making tanks; there is no hospital and casualties of war; there are no tanks passing by but cars, transporting people to their business.' Bring such good thoughts to mind, and a doxology will fill your heart." Thus, the poor man understood that what matters most is to confront these problems appropriately, and he left in peace. Little by little, he managed to deal with the situation with good thoughts, and eventually threw away the pills and began sleeping without difficulty. Do you see how a good thought can take care of one's troubles?

Once I was on a bus and the conductor turned the music on really loud. Some religious young men pointed out to him that there was a monk on the bus and they repeatedly made signs to him to turn it off. They tried once or twice but without result. He turned the music even

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louder. "Let him be," I told the young men, "it does not matter. It keeps the drone tone to my chanting"! "God forbid," I said to myself, "but if there was an accident further down the road and they were forced to put the injured people in our bus, how would I bear to see people with broken legs, broken heads? Thank God that people are not only well, but they are even singing"! So, I had a great trip chanting away!

Let me tell you another example, to see how a good thought can help us appropriately in any situation. I was in Jerusalem once with an acquaintance of mine. There was some sort of festivity there. They were celebrating a feast and constantly crying out, it was a madhouse. *Sing to Him ... with loud shouts*; *Praise Him with loud clashing cymbals*![5] You could not understand what they were saying, and it went on all night long. My acquaintance got upset and went to the window. He did not sleep a wink, while I slept like a bird by just bringing to mind a good thought. I remembered the scene of the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt and this provided me with a sense of spiritual exaltation.

This is how you too should confront any situation, with good thoughts. Let's say, for example, a door slammed. You must say, "If, God forbid, something bad had happened to a Sister, if she fell and broke her leg, would I be sleeping now? Here, as it is, it was only a door that slammed; a Sister must have had something to take care of." But, if one starts criticizing and saying, "Here she goes again, slamming the door! She is so careless!" There is no way that one who thinks this way can find peace!

5. Ps 33:3; Ps 150:5.

The moment you start having such thoughts, the devil will come to upset you even more. Or, let's say, one of you hears an alarm going off at night. You hear it go off once, and in a while you hear it go off again. If you start thinking, "This soul must have been very tired; she could not get up. It is good that she slept another half hour and then got up to do her spiritual duties." If the Sister brings such thoughts to mind, she will not be annoyed and upset because someone woke her up. But if she thinks only of herself and how the alarm clock woke her up, then all she will be thinking is, "Whatever is going on in this place? No one can ever get some rest!" This is why the benefit you receive from a good thought, you will never get from any other *ascesis*.

It Is the Inner Tranquillity That We Must Acquire

Our goal should be to take all that comes our way and make the best out of it for the sake of the spiritual struggle in which we are engaged. We must strive to acquire the inner tranquillity, and to this end even noise can become a good thing if it is met with the right thought. What matters the most is handling a problem in the right way. We must face up to everything using good thoughts. When, in very midst of noise, you manage to reach inner tranquillity, you have achieved something of great value. If you cannot find tranquillity in the midst of disturbance, you will not be able to be tranquil even in the midst of tranquillity. When inner tranquillity comes to a man, everything inside him will be tranquil, and he will not be disturbed by anything. But if he requires external tranquillity in order to find inner tranquillity, then, when he

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does find himself in such a place, he will want a cane to chase away the cicadas by day and the jackal by night, so that they will not bother him! In other words, he will be chasing away what in fact the devil is gathering. What do you think the devil's job is after all? His job is to create difficulties and to obstruct our efforts, until he has completely turned us upside down.

Once, in a *Skete*, two very old monks got a donkey that had a bell on him. A young monk, who wished to practice tranquillity, complained about the donkey's bell and used all the canons to prove that donkeys should not be allowed in a *Skete*. The other Fathers said that they were not bothered by it at all. So I said to him, "Isn't it enough for you that the old men do not bother us at all, but take care of their own needs with the donkey? If it did not have a bell, they would lose it and then we would have to go looking for it. Why complain about a good thing?" If we do not have such good thoughts and make the best of all situations in matters spiritual, we will not meet with success, even if we were to live next to Saints. Let's say that I find myself at a military base. I should think of the trumpet as a church bell and the weapon should remind me of the spiritual weapons against the devil. If we don't use all situations in a spiritual way, even a bell will annoy us. We have two choices: Either we will utilize them for the right purpose or the devil will take advantage of them. The restless person will carry his restlessness even into the desert. What a soul must acquire first is the ability to find inner tranquillity in the midst of external disturbance; only then will tranquillity be found in the stillness of the desert.

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His message

First we believe in God and then we love God and His image, the man. Faith increases with prayers. "Add us faith".

"As i have realised all evil comes from unfaithfulness. When someone doesn't believe in God he wants to have fun. So he falls into every kind of sin".

"People must understand the deepest meaning of life that is, that this life is given to prepare us for the future life. The people must find a guide, a religius guide, as the ones who need a guide when they travels. Then with the help of the religius guide people will programme their life, with a little study, a little prayer and avoiding the causes of sin and the wordly thinking which is the worst of all. So their heart will be devoted to Christ".

"We must wrestle with mettle to save ourselves and not to pain Christ. Christ will tell us "My child i have done so many things to save you. I have shed my blood and i have gone through passion, what have you done to save yourself?"

"Each person must find his inclination. The hard-working person, either in married life or in monastic, will be successful".

"We should prefer sadness and accept it more than we accept happiness. The bitter medicine is usually better than the sweet because it cures. Real happiness springs from pain".

"What prevents people from succeding in his spiritual life is the fact that he uses his brain not to improve his spiritual life but to do other things".

"We must feel the pain for our present state to be able to pray with all our heart".

"Now it is the time to seperate the kids from the lambs, the faithful fom the unfaithful. Later there will be time when we take examinations and

suffer persecation for our faith and copper will be separated from gold".

"When somebody is troubled because he suffers for other, cares for other, makes their problems his own problems then he will get the pay of a martyr. How lovely are the people who sacrifice everything! They don't have any problems and their face shines because they are filled with God's joy".

"The basis of our spiritual life is to think of the others first and then of ourselves. When we get into the others place and understand them then we are related to Christ".

"God's grace is an expensive thing. It must find the person who spiritually agrees with God to come and stay in his heart. And of course the person must work hard to get it, while we want God's grace to come and release us from weaknesses without struggling for it".

"It takes lots of sacrifice, self denial, modesty mettle to make the Holy Ghost come and stay in people's hearts. Spiritual life isn't enjoyment. Christ has put the plug but our wires are rusty and they don't get God's grace. We should remove the rust from our wires, struggle to know ourselves, stop passions and get the virtues to make God's grace visit us".

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